



## The Principals' Partnership

<http://www.principalspartnership.com/>

Sponsored by Union Pacific Foundation

### Research Brief

#### Sustained Silent Reading

#### Question: Why should Sustained Silent Reading be used at the high school level?

##### Summary of Findings:

“I teach science (or another subject), I am not an English teacher,” “These kids don’t read,” “Kids aren’t as smart as they used to be,” are sentiments commonly expressed by high school teachers. The teaching of formal reading tends to end when students leave elementary school, yet in elementary school, 80% of the reading is fiction and in secondary school, 80% of their reading is non-fiction. There is an assumption on the part of secondary teachers that students have the requisite reading skills to carry them through their schooling, which is not true. They may have the basic skills, but they need to be trained in the literacy of each subject field, especially as the students mature and get into more challenging courses. There are around eight million struggling readers in grades four through twelve (*Reading next: A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy*) who are often at least two years below grade level in reading (*Secondary school reading: Using the quality principle of continuous improvement to build an exemplary program*). About 70% of older adolescents need some type of remediation in reading, usually in the area of comprehension. According to surveys conducted by Trelease, an expert in this field, 90% of students spend 1% of their free time reading, 30% watch television, 50% read less than four minutes a day, 30% read two minutes a day and 10% do not spend any time reading (*Musselman High School; What is sustained silent reading?*). Findings from several studies have found that students who entered high school as poor readers remained so throughout their high school career (*Use it or lose it*). Gone are the days when students can graduate from or leave high school at age 16 with below average literacy skills and find work earning a livable wage. The current and future job market requires workers who are highly literate, which means they can read with comprehension, assess and interpret the information, then utilize it appropriately.

It is incumbent upon schools to provide students with the reading and literacy skills they will need to be successful in the world beyond school. Atwell, a leading authority in literacy stated, “If we want our adolescent students to grow to appreciate literature, another first step is allowing them to exert ownership and choose the literature they will read” (*Evaluating Sustained Silent Reading in reading classes*). How can high schools help students become literate adults who are lifelong readers? Hunt, a professor at the University of Vermont, introduced the concept of Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) in the late 1960s. The premise was that students will become better readers the more they read and will read more if they select their reading material. One Colorado high school found that students who participated in SSR improved 1.9 grade levels as opposed to those who did not, who improved .5 grade level (*Greeley West High School*). Surveys done with adolescents reported that those who read for fun had higher proficiency scores than those who did not. Some test results have found that students who participated in SSR made gains in their vocabulary, reading and comprehension levels (*Evaluating Sustained Silent Reading in reading classes; Secondary school reading: Using the quality principle of continuous improvement to build an exemplary program*).

##### Components of a SSR Program

- It should be part of the school’s goals to help students develop literacy. Reading needs to be viewed by everyone as their priority and responsibility.
- All stakeholders, including students, should have a buy-in to and will support the program.



## The Principals' Partnership

<http://www.principalspartnership.com/>

Sponsored by Union Pacific Foundation

### Research Brief

- Research indicates the most successful programs ran over at least six months.
- All students, staff (including administrative assistants, custodians, cafeteria workers, and administrators) should participate.
- It should be done as a school at one time during the day. The research reported that schools often began for 15-20 minutes once a week, then moved to 2-3 times a week once there was more of a comfort level with it. It can be done during homeroom and/or add minutes onto one particular class period or lunch (See *Use it or lose it; Sustained silent reading and young adult short stories for high school; Secondary school reading: Using the quality principle of continuous improvement to build an exemplary program*; references to the particular schools in the reference list).
- Provide on-going training and support for all staff on reading strategies.
- Educate the parents about SSR and what they can do at home to support it (see *Musselman High School, El Camino High School, Greeley West High School* on the reference list).
- Teachers should be a role model and read for pleasure during this time. There should not be grading of work, making phone calls, etc. during this time.
- Provide a wide variety and array of reading materials. Some schools have rotating libraries that move among staff. Many schools have been awarded grants to help fund the libraries. Solicit donations of used books and magazines from students, parents and community.
- Allow students to read what they want to read, as long as it is appropriate. If they do not have something to read, have them complete a survey for the librarian who can help them find material about their interests (see *Greeley West High School* reference for the Reader Advisory Service form).
- Establish a Reading or Literacy Committee to review and assess the program, modify it as suitable and provide on-going staff development for all staff.
- Some schools: establish reward systems for the number of pages read; have students discuss with their peers what they have read and their response to their reading; complete reading logs or dialogue journals; and/or write a brief summary of the material at the end of their reading.
- Provide a low risk and highly safe environment where no comments are made about the students' reading choices (unless the choice is totally inappropriate).

#### Online Resources:

\* Please note in the annotations, SSR means Sustained Silent Reading.

- Effective silent reading  
This is a brief exchange between two teachers about SSR.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3617/is\\_200402/ai\\_n9408486](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3617/is_200402/ai_n9408486)
- Evaluating sustained silent reading in reading classes  
A brief review of studies conducted on SSR is presented in this article.  
<http://iteslj.org/Articles/Chow-SSR.html>
- Ideanet forum  
This is 1 question and answer about SSR scheduling at the secondary level.  
[http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/htbin/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get\\_topic;f=3;t=000072;p=0](http://ideanet.doe.state.in.us/htbin/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic;f=3;t=000072;p=0)



## The Principals' Partnership

<http://www.principalspartnership.com/>

Sponsored by Union Pacific Foundation

### Research Brief

- Independent reading strategies  
A brief description of SSR is provided in this piece.  
<http://www.sedl.org/cgi-bin/mysql/buildingreading.cgi?showrecord=6&l=description>
- Reading next. A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy  
This is a detailed report about the need for adolescents to develop reading literacy and contains essential components necessary to make it all happen.  
<http://www.all4ed.org/publications/ReadingNext/ReadingNext.pdf>
- Reading researchers outline elements needed to achieve adolescent literacy  
This article includes 15 reading essentials for adolescents.  
<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2004/10/20/08literacy.h24.html>
- Reading to achieve: A governor's guide to adolescent literacy  
Critical components for helping secondary students develop literacy skills, along with descriptions of successful programs, are present in this thorough document.  
<http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0510GOVGUIDELITERACY.PDF>
- Required reading proves a joy at Ferris  
A brief description of a SSR program at a high school in Washington is given.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4186/is\\_20010920/ai\\_n11636448/print](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4186/is_20010920/ai_n11636448/print)
- Secondary school reading: Using the quality principle of continuous improvement to build an exemplary program.  
  
This article provides a description of reading programs implemented at a high school in Georgia.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3696/is\\_199905/ai\\_n8835487/print](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3696/is_199905/ai_n8835487/print)
- Silent sustained reading and young adult short stories for high school  
This article provides a description of SSR and a pilot program at a high school.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4063/is\\_200210/ai\\_n9098488](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4063/is_200210/ai_n9098488)
- Support for sustained silent reading  
This article provides snippets from research that support SSR.  
<http://www.angelfire.com/ok/freshenglish/ssr.html>
- Sustained silent reading  
This is a brief description of the characteristics of an effective SSR program.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustained\\_silent\\_reading](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustained_silent_reading)



## The Principals' Partnership

<http://www.principalspartnership.com/>

Sponsored by Union Pacific Foundation

### Research Brief

- Sustained silent reading helps develop independent readers  
This is a brief description of varied components of SSR programs.  
[http://www.education-world.com/a\\_curr/curr038.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr038.shtml)
- The literacy council: People are key to an effective program  
A description of the role of a school literacy council is given in this article.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa3696/is\\_199810/ai\\_n8808310/print](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3696/is_199810/ai_n8808310/print)
- Use it or lose it  
This is a description of several reading strategies/programs that were initiated at a high school in Tennessee.  
[http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4002/is\\_200311/ai\\_n9336766/print](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4002/is_200311/ai_n9336766/print)
- What is sustained silent reading  
Some guidelines to use during SSR are provided in this article.  
<http://www.dowlingcentral.com/MrsD/area/literature/ssr.html>

#### **Additional resources**

- Building student literacy through silent sustained reading  
“Find out how a simple and inexpensive program of sustained silent reading--where students read independently during class time--can be a sure-fire way to improve student vocabulary development, literacy skills, and background knowledge.

Teacher-author Steve Gardiner updates you on the research studies that validate sustained silent reading as a successful way to help build the literacy skills of students at all ability levels, including ESL students.

With lots of classroom anecdotes, practical tips, and testimony from students, parents, and fellow teachers, this book gives you all the ideas and advice you need to get started:

- Why sustained silent reading belongs in a high-stakes testing school environment
  - What students should read and how much time to allocate for reading
  - How a sustained silent reading program promotes five essential reading skills
  - Ways to make students accountable for what they read without adding to your paperwork
  - Steps to starting and running a sustained silent reading program
  - Tips for helping students who are struggling with sustained silent Reading”
- Ideas for connecting sustained silent reading to teaching writing  
<http://shop.ascd.org/productdisplay.cfm?productid=105027>



## The Principals' Partnership

<http://www.principalspartnership.com/>

Sponsored by Union Pacific Foundation

### Research Brief

- Resources available on SSR  
A list of articles and books about SSR and active links to purchase them are on this site.  
<http://www.questia.com/library/education/sustained-silent-reading.jsp>

#### Schools

- El Camino High School  
This is a brochure from a high school that describes their SSR program, with inclusion of its bell schedule.  
<http://slisweb.sjsu.edu/proj/advocacy/CummingsReading.pdf>
- Enumclaw school district- Washington State  
This piece briefly describes the roles of teachers and students in their SSR program.  
<http://www.enumclaw.wednet.edu/teachlearn/SSR.shtml>
- Fountain Valley High School  
This is a letter from a high school principal to the parents about the SSR program at the school.  
<http://www.fvhs.com/dpts/pr/ssr.cfm>
- Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Development  
This is a link to this school's site, with a very brief description of their SSR program.  
<http://www.greatoaks.com/pages/-4862-/>
- Greeley West High School  
This handbook lays out the guidelines for the school's SSR program, answers FAQs and contains a survey students can complete to give to the librarian for help to access appropriate readings.  
<http://west.greeleyschools.org/westnew/Library/ssr.PDF>
- Musselmen High School  
This is a description of a SSR program at a high school and its guidelines.  
<http://boe.berk.k12.wv.us/bcschools/s503/SSR.htm>
- Sustained silent reading  
This is the schedule and guidelines for SSR at a high school.  
<http://www.cchs165.jacksn.k12.il.us/announcements/Reading/SSR.htm>

Submitted Date: 7/31/06

By: Dr. Karen Walker Lebanon Valley College



## **The Principals' Partnership**

<http://www.principalspartnership.com/>

Sponsored by Union Pacific Foundation

### **Research Brief**

<http://www.principalspartnership.com/>

This is provided as a service to educators by The Principals Partnership and Union Pacific Foundation, neither of which assumes any responsibility for the content of the brief or the positions taken by the authors or the Web sites or other authors whose works are included. This research brief reflects information currently available and is not the official position of The Principals Partnership or Union Pacific Foundation.

Disclaimer: All URLs listed in this site have been tested for accuracy, and contents of Web sites examined for quality, at the time of addition. Content accuracy and appropriateness, however, cannot be guaranteed over time as Web sites and their contents change constantly. The author takes no responsibility for difficulties which may result from the use of any Web site listed herein. Please notify the [Webmaster](#) if you find any dead links or inappropriate material.

Permission: You may use or download content for research or educational purposes, or for your personal, noncommercial purposes, provided you keep unchanged all copyright and other notices with them. No other use of any content is permitted. You agree that you will make only lawful use of this research brief, and will only use these briefs in compliance with all federal, state and local laws and regulations. You agree that you will make no use of the research that violates anyone else's rights, including copyright, trademark, trade secret, right of privacy, right of publicity or other rights.